

January 4, 2024

Director Greg Spotts
City of Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)
Seattle Municipal Tower 700 Fifth Ave, Suite 3800
P.O. Box 34966 Seattle, WA 98124

RE: ROUTE 40 CONCERNS

Submitted via email to:

Mayor Bruce Harrell
Council President Sara Nelson
Councilmember Dan Strauss
Councilmember Rob Saka
Councilmember Robert Kettle
Deputy Mayor Tim Burgess
Deputy Adiam Emery
Deputy Mayor Greg Wong
SDOT Sr. Deputy Director Francisca Stefan
SDOT Public Engagement Lead Jules Posadas

Dear Director Spotts:

We are a coalition of neighborhood organizations, industrial stakeholders, businesses and property owners who have consistently voiced strong concerns about SDOT's plans to add road diets, lane restrictions and bus-only lanes through primary neighborhood arterials in Ballard, Fremont and along Westlake Ave N as part of the Route 40 Transit-Plus Multimodal Corridor Study.

We are writing again as a follow up to our letter from June 5, 2023, which shared numerous concerns from our Ballard / Fremont / Westlake neighborhood coalition. **Our coalition now represents more than 50 neighborhood organizations, businesses, property owners and retailers along the Route 40 alignment.**

As a strong and growing coalition, we request that implementation of any proposed Route 40 changes is paused until the significant issues outlined below can be fully addressed.

As a reminder, here are our concerns:

- As SDOT’s website confirms, before COVID, Route 40 was one of Metro’s highest ridership routes with 13,000 weekday riders. That number has dropped to an average of 7,000 riders – roughly half of the pre-pandemic ridership levels. While this number is touted as strong, it is still drastically less ridership than when the Route 40 changes were studied.
- As small businesses are still working to recover from the global pandemic, we are deeply concerned that the proposed Route 40 changes are not based in reality. The proposed changes do not account for the fact that commute and office work patterns have forever changed.
- We share SDOT’s transit and multimodal goals for Seattle’s neighborhoods and are advocates for connecting our north-end communities with reliable transit service. But these changes must be grounded with reliable, targeted, current post-COVID data that includes an evaluation of current ridership and traffic patterns.
- ***Bus Ridership Will Increase When Transit Rider Health and Safety Issues Are Addressed***
New changes, such as those proposed for Route 40, are banking on assumptions that post-COVID ridership will continue to grow and return to pre-COVID levels. This only focuses on return-to-work and does not address the serious health and safety issues that continue to impact bus riders and ridership.

New King County Metro data that states there were 1,885 reports of drug use on their bus system in 2022 alone. In addition, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) recently reported that oxycodone pills, commonly laced with fentanyl, are “openly smoked or ‘freebased’ by riders aboard buses and trains, exposing riders and operators to fumes often described as ‘sickening’.

The public safety issues also directly impact neighborhood businesses. For example, the Starbucks located on the corner of Fremont Ave N and N 34th St. recently announced it is closing, due in large part to the sustained impact from the Route 40 bus idling directly in front of the store multiple times a day. Not to mention the crime and theft that accompanies the bus presence on a daily basis.

There must be a clear plan from King County METRO on how they will address open air drug use on buses, which is a health, safety and equity issue for transit riders and drivers. Without a plan, it is clear ridership will continue to struggle long into the future.

Here are our specific concerns about the proposed changes to Route 40 organized by segment:

- ***Access Concerns from Westlake Ave N Property Owners and Maritime Tenants***

Adding a dedicated bus lane on both the east and west sides of Westlake Ave N. is a significant reduction in capacity with direct impacts to existing property owners and tenants. While SDOT has responded to the specific concerns for freight deliveries of one property owner on the west side of Westlake North (Pelington Properties) by creating a transitional delivery lane, the plan still includes a bus-only lane both north and south-bound.

Even when ridership was at its height, there were no issues of congestion or delays for buses on Westlake N. Bus only lanes are a solution to a non-problem and should be removed from the plan. We appreciate the inclusion of a pedestrian-operated crosswalk to enable residents, business owners and customers to safely cross the street and the addition of a bus stop at Halladay.

One lane of car traffic headed north is very likely to cause long backups in the summer as the Fremont Bridge is raised. The summer cueing currently extends about a half mile down Westlake with two lanes for car traffic. Again, with ridership still at ~ 50% of pre-COVID numbers and a lack of data on post-COVID ridership trends, this change would have significant impact on workers, residents and small businesses who must have dependable access over the Fremont Bridge.

There is a secondary impact to this cueing with the dedicated bus lane just north of the Bridge on 36th Ave N that will compound through Westlake Ave N in the summer.

- ***Significant Impacts for Fremont Neighborhood Thru Put***

Reducing traffic east/west from the north end of the Fremont Bridge roughly ten blocks to First Avenue NW will have significant impacts on commute times for residents, workers, and will impact small business owners. We have not seen a quantified and meaningful transit time savings and clear transit benefits relative to the considerable and sustained neighborhood impacts.

This stretch is already very volatile to backups and long wait times headed north or south over the Fremont Bridge, which is compounded in the summer. Summer traffic includes significant and important tourism traffic, including visitors to the Nordic Museum, the Ballard Locks, the Shilshole Bay Marina and Golden Gardens Park.

We all know daily commute trips, specifically those going to-and-from downtown, changed dramatically during COVID. It's becoming equally clear that we do not yet know what the 'new normal' will be and a return to work at pre-COVID levels may not happen. Fremont is a strong example of how without updated data, and more time to see how commute patterns will evolve, the proposed Route 40 changes could result in negative unintended consequences that create neighborhood thru put hardships that cannot be undone. Saving a few minutes on bus arrival times for the magnitude of potential impacts does not seem warranted.

We're also concerned about ongoing queueing issues, on the alignment and side streets, and their corresponding carbon impacts in Ballard, Fremont and along Westlake Ave N. over time. As we know, transportation is the largest source of carbon pollution in our state, contributing roughly 22% of total air pollution and 39% of greenhouse gas emissions. By creating a scenario where we're adding dedicated bus lanes for buses that are at ~ 50% capacity and at the same time adding significantly to traffic idling times is not in alignment with our city's carbon reduction goals.

- **Impacts of Ballard Road Diet, Dedicated Bus Lanes Outweigh Benefits**

The addition of a 24/7 north bound bus-only lane on Leary Avenue NW between 20th Avenue NW and NW Market Street will have substantial access impact on small businesses, as well as residential and retirement communities located all along the corridor.

Leary Avenue NW is a highly-trafficked thru put and connector for residents, workers and visitors headed northwest into Ballard. SDOT's proposed road diet and dedicated bus lanes on Leary Ave NW will force car trips off Leary and further complicate already very congested neighborhood traffic patterns. In addition, NW Ballard Ave is now mostly one-way and one-lane in some areas, with heavily reduced on-street parking due to the street cafes.

With both important north / south neighborhood streets already feeling the strain of multiple transit / bicycle / pedestrian / general through-put objectives, reducing car through-put for Leary Avenue NW and east / west via NW Market Street is very problematic.

Equally impactful, the 24/7 bus lanes in both directions of NW Market Street between Leary and 24th Avenue NW – along with new curb bulbs – will eliminate two travel lanes, as well as already scarce on-street parking spaces and load zones that are very needed for the small businesses located along this corridor.

Accessing west Ballard via Leary Avenue NW or NW Market Street, mostly via car, is the primary route for the tens of thousands of (mostly tourist) visitors who head to the Ballard Locks and National Nordic Museum. Even for the tens of thousands of local visitors who attend the very popular annual summer events in the heart of downtown Ballard (SeafoodFest, Syttende Mai Parade), most do not arrive via bus. Encouraging local and family bus use to annual Seattle events will need a dedicated marketing effort from SDOT.

We appreciate the attention to improving pedestrian safety, but equal attention needs to be given to the impacts of on-street parking removal, bus-only transit lanes and road diets will have on small businesses along Leary Ave NW, which depend on customers' ability to easily get to and access their shops.

In addition, the proposed changes do not consider that the city is also still considering Leary Ave NW as a possible Burke-Gilman Trail 'missing link' alignment alternative and the compounding impact these changes would have on this important route through Ballard.

In addition, the Northgate light rail station opening, which was not a factor when Route 40 pre-pandemic ridership data was collected, will also have a meaningful impact on transit commute patterns and should also be considered.

In summary, while we are all supporters of transit and SDOT's ongoing investment in new system improvements, there's a significant body of study work that must be done to ensure the pre-COVID changes proposed to Route 40 are still aligned with neighborhood commute patterns, ridership goals, and business and resident concerns from our coalition.

Specifically, our stakeholder group needs to better understand the project's overall impact on our neighborhoods and would be assisted with the following information from SDOT:

- Current data that compares baseline transit travel time to travel time with the improvements - by segment and approach to intersections;
- Current transit travel time benefits by location and time of day;
- Benefits accrued to transit riders compared to the impact to adjacent businesses and neighborhoods; and
- Current traffic impact data from the Vissim analysis that addresses different stakeholder concerns. For example, peak hour queueing on side streets is important to neighborhoods and travel time in general-purpose traffic lanes, and the width is important to freight transport.
- The 90% design plans are available but with limited design details and we do not have data or impact analysis that reflects those plans. In addition, we found some

inconsistencies between the 60% design plans and what was shown for public review and feedback on the Route 40 website. We need to understand the actual design and the corresponding impact analysis.

We look forward to a complete response to all our questions and concerns outlined herein. In addition, we look forward to meaningful engagement from SDOT as we work together to reach a compromised solution for the proposed Route 40 changes.

Until such time, we will continue raising awareness about our shared Route 40 concerns and work to bring more voices to bear on a process that has been woefully short on data and meaningful community and stakeholder engagement.

Sincerely,

Mike Stewart Ballard Alliance	Pete Hanning Fremont Chamber	Eugene Wasserman NSIA	Sooz Appel Pelington Properties, LLC
Hoby Douglass Nautical Landing Marina	Suzie Burke Fremont Dock Company	David D'Hondt AGC of Washington	Tom Malone Malone Law Group
Jay Jennings NW Marine Trade Association	Sue Dills Commercial Marine	Todd Banks Kenmore Air	Kevin Wold Nautical Landing Marina
Mauri Moore Shuler Lake Union Liveaboard Assoc.	Jennifer Moran Carter Subaru and Volkswagen	Eric Nelson National Nordic Museum	Elliot Strong Coastal Transportation, Inc.
Russell Shrewsbury Western Towboat Co	John Teutsch Teutsch Partners LLC	Markham Scott Boatworld Marinas	Cole Verner Holland Partner Group
Shep Salusky Temperate Paradise Properties, LLC	Monique Webber Pacific Yacht Management	John Nelson Westlake Cove Houseboat Coop	Doug Dixon Pacific Fishermen Shipyard
Art Olson Olson Real Estate Associates	Lowen Clausen CKM Associates	Michele Snyder One Oak	Michael Peck Peck Properties
Dee Simon 2040 Coop	Dixie McCullough Signature Yachts	Lori Mason etg Coffee Shop	Tony Barber SmartPlug

Paul Hunsinger
Limback Lumber

Jeanny Rhee
Made In House

Lindsey Runyon
Bellefleur Lingerie

Christy McDanold
Secret Garden Books

Stephanie Hara
Show Pony Boutique

Tori Parrot
Signature Yachts

Kristie Kisbye
Annie's Art & Frame

Michael Wanaka
Olympic Jewelry

Sheryl and Rob
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Eileen and Charlie
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